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Infrastructure Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

April 23, 2021

Attendees

- Joe Campbell — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- George Claffey — Central Connecticut State University
- Burt Cohen — Office of Consumer Counsel
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Karen Fildes — New Fairfield Public Schools
- Fred Kass — Trinity College
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Ryan Kocsondy — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Michael Mundrane — University of Connecticut
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LiOn)

Agenda

- Federal Funding and Programs
- Eduroam Updates
- Open Education Resources: Timing and Collections

Welcome

Tom Dillon, Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Council, called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM and asked Doug to provide some background on the first agenda item concerning broadband legislation and standards.

Federal Funding and Programs

Congress has passed legislation over the past few months to increase access to broadband through a number of new programs. Doug provided highlights first of the [Emergency Broadband Benefit](#) (EBB), designed to offset the costs of home Internet access through a \$3.1B appropriation. The program provides a \$50 monthly credit for broadband to qualifying households (e.g., National School Lunch Program eligible, Medicaid eligible, Pell Grant recipients, etc.). The Commission facilitated a session from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) May 19 and has posted numerous resources to assist organizations interested in helping individuals get online or use the EBB program to help pay for Internet access at www.bit.ly/CT_Home_BB. At the time of



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this writing, EBB was scheduled to launch on Wednesday, May 12, 2021. Burt Cohen added that, given the broad eligibility criteria, many Connecticut households may qualify for EBB offsets. Real options for families will depend on the tiers of service their local carrier chooses to provide under the program.

While EBB will serve all qualifying households, the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) addresses the specific needs of schools and libraries, serving essentially as an extension of the E-rate program. The \$7.1B allocation for ECF will help connect students and library patrons at home and may pay for past investments in connectivity. Doug noted that, as with EBB, the ECF program is still in development by the FCC, with formal rules expected in May.

While not specifically earmarked for broadband and technology, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds that districts will receive can be used to help close the digital divide. The nearly \$1B in funding expected to reach Connecticut districts this spring will assist with COVID-related education concerns, including learning loss, safety and mitigation, and technology to support remote and blended learning.

Tom expressed concern that schools, universities, and libraries — not to mention families — may find the new programs difficult to navigate. Doug committed to sharing as much information as available through the Commission's Web site and events such as the FCC Webinar earlier that week. He has communicated the immediate next step for families to register through the Lifeline program Web site (www.lifelinesupport.org) as a first step to enrolling in the EBB program. Burt mentioned that the ARP will provide funding for broadband buildouts that Connecticut may leverage. Doug noted the Governor's release of his [ARP plan](#) later that day, including \$15M to expand the Everybody Learns community wireless initiative.

Ryan Kocsondy, Director of the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) oversees the community wireless initiative and welcomed the proposed expansion, noting that the biggest challenges to date have been logistical in coordinating site visits and installations with participating institutions. To date, about 100 sites have come online with another 30 scheduled for installation. Because of budget reductions, the program has funding for up to 150 installations, though CEN has purchased 200 access points based on original allocations. Rick Widlansky indicated that many of the Libraries Online (LiON) members would have interest in covering installation costs in exchange for the free access point, enclosure, and injector. Ryan stated that he is working with the Connecticut State Library to communicate the availability of access points to local libraries. Interested parties can view the status of installations through www.ctedunet.net/everyonelearnswifiinitiative.



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Eduroam Updates

The current and planned community wireless access points will allow students and faculty to log on through [Eduroam](#), the global authentication system. Doug noted that leaders from New Haven Public Schools (NHPS), Southern Connecticut State University (NHPS), CEN, and the Commission will speak to the benefits of using Eduroam at an upcoming session at the 2021 CEN Conference. Tom underscored the relative ease with which NHPS deployed Eduroam to allow all of its students to authenticate onto any access point hosted by NHPS, SCSU, Yale, and other institutions using Eduroam. Both Michael Mundrane and Fred Kass pointed to the essential components necessary to offer Eduroam, including a radius server, managed wireless solution, and an identity store such as Active Directory or LDAP. Having these elements in place remain best practices regardless of an institution's decision to use Eduroam. Kerri Kearney did mention that while Eduroam holds great potential in the K – 12 community, younger students often find it hard to remember their usernames and passwords.

Michael reminded the group that Eduroam not only allows institutions to provide authenticated access to wireless networks but also allows those schools, libraries, and universities to see exactly who is using their network. Plus, allowing students and faculty to use Eduroam means they can get online at more than 900 institutions worldwide. Doug pointed to Connecticut reaching a 1:1 student-to-device ratio at the K – 12 level this past summer, with the purchase of more than 140,000 computers, making secure broadband access imperative. Doug pointed back to the availability of one-time funding to set up Eduroam within school districts by leveraging federal stimulus funds. Ryan reiterated CEN's capacity to provide guidance and bulk purchasing of licenses to support local implementations.

In addition to the expanded footprint of Eduroam through the Community Wireless initiative, Ryan mentioned that several districts — Newington, Plainfield, and Simsbury — are interested in and poised to deploy Eduroam for their students and staff. Fred reiterated his interest in working with Hartford Public Schools to offer Eduroam through Trinity College, and Doug noted the proximity of CREC's magnet schools at the Learning Corridor as potential partners as well. Fred also encouraged working with the [Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance](#) (SINA) in Hartford.

The Advisory Council members briefly discussed the relationship between Eduroam and other authentication systems such as [Anyroam](#) and [Govroam](#), designed for local, state, and federal government entities. Tom expressed interest in using one of these platforms to leverage the wireless networks of hospitals and other healthcare facilities.



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Education Resources: Timing and Collections

Doug thanked the members for their engagement and enthusiasm around Eduroam and shifted to provide a brief overview of the Commission's work underway on GoOpenCT.org, a statewide portal for open education Resources (OER). The site will help ensure equitable access to high-quality, free learning materials; make college more affordable for students; reduce materials costs for schools; encourage the collaborative creation and curation of these resources; and maximize the impact of existing content collections by sharing them across school districts, universities, and libraries.

He asked for feedback on the previously shared list of content collections, including K – 12 sources such as Khan Academy as well as higher education materials from programs such as OpenStax at Rice University. Registered users of Go Open CT will be able to access nearly 7,000 learning materials from more than 30 content collections when the site launches in the early fall.

Fred commented that Trinity has OER efforts underway to help reduce the cost of college at Trinity. Tom asked about the long-term plans for the site, and Doug underscored the role of Go Open CT as the platform for sharing content collections across state institutions indefinitely. Funding for the site implementation and first three years of hosting and support are already in place.

Adjournment

Tom closed the meeting with thanks to each of the Advisory Council members for their continued engagement. He concluded the meeting at approximately 11:15 AM.